

News and Comment About the New Plays

Courageous Playwrights Are Making Middle Aged Heroes

Does Anybody Love a Mature Character and Are the Dramatists About to Change an Old View? Some Thoughts on the New Plays.

By LAWRENCE REAMER.

OUR theater has always been dominated by the youthful protagonists. Younger lovers may not in life be the most interesting creatures in the world, but there is a tradition of the mandarins that they are important in the theater. Managers would not therefore give any aid to dramatists so carefree of public taste as to present them with manuscripts in which the amorous interest was centered in any others than the flappers and their sweethearts. Thus were the engrossing situations that might exist among lovers of an older age excluded from the stage. As a matter of fact they were for years as strictly inhibited as if some severe censor had forbidden them.

There was more than the mere conviction that young persons were not entertained by them. Their elders found the youthful love affairs vastly more interesting. They might take some interest in watching the emotional struggles of their contemporaries, but they were much more entertained by the love affairs of the young. Thus the youthful and the more mature made a double audience for the play about youthful hearts as opposed to the one public that interested itself in the second-hand palpitations of the older folk.

Maybe the times have changed, although there is little evidence that human nature so far as the theater is concerned has altered a bit. At all events playwrights are more courageous. There is not the echo of a flapper's voice to be heard in "Fools Errand." Mr. Shipman has kept his quartet of lovers well out of its teens. Mr. Richman has, on the other hand, made his love story in the end center about the parents of the possible lovers in the opening scene.

When "A Serpent's Tooth" has come to its end and the boulder of a hero is facing banishment to the Argentine or some other reformatory for youthful stage rotters, papa and mamma are cannoodling so happily that only the most unregenerate flapper could deny that the play possessed a heart interest in its old people, moreover.

"The Old Soak" is Inventive.

Don Marquis's hero in "The Old Soak" uses the fireplace in what was probably called the parlor of the family home at Baycliff as his cache. There he secretly draws out the bottle when, in the first act of the play at the Plymouth Theater, one sees him at his favorite relaxation. His foot involuntarily seeks the railing of the brass fender. Thus he stands in that attitude of comfort which has been so rudely interrupted by constitutional amendment.

Harry Beresford, who so splendidly incarnates the thirsty vagabond, plays this scene with rich humor, familiarly speaking to his imaginary companions, exchanging courtesies with the bartender of blessed memory and dispensing his hospitalities to his comrades with all the little attentions that had become established as conventions of the rite.

Once again in the opening act does the audience see this noble drinker enjoying himself. The home brew contributed by the faithful Al, the former barkeeper, has again failed in spite of the persistence with which he keeps on thinking that the next time it will turn out all right. But there is still some in the bottle of real pre-Volstead distillation. So he shares this with the well meaning if amateur distiller and the hired girl has the privilege of a sip.

The harmless little orgy progresses through the historic stages. Exhilaration is followed by a gentle melancholy, and then there is some "close harmony" to end the session, "Rock of Ages" serving to inspire the revelers with serious and contemplative joy. It is deliciously humorous in its execution and as irresistibly natural as any of the little episodes that make up the play.

Of course, there may be theatergoers who are not going to care for a protagonist who goes through three acts always in a state of mild or maybe only potential intoxication. It will never be possible, however, to deny that Mr. Beresford suggests with amazing truth to life yet without offensiveness physical or otherwise a man always more or less exalted. He is forever seeing life through a rosy haze.

Every cloud has a silver lining. With this state of contentment, however, there is the mood of apology, the sense of inferiority that such a habit engenders. Complete satisfaction with himself is possible only when he is in the society of those who admit their thirst to be just as strong as his. He may stand with his foot on the fender as if it were the rail in front of the bar and he may sing close harmony with the hired girl and the retired barkeeper. Yet he feels the inferiority which this weakness creates in him. He goes contentedly down, therefore, to mingle with that society which his wife finds such a reprehensible feature of Smith's Hotel.

The old soak knows his inferiority to most of the other men who do not take such pleasure out of their liquor. He attempts to meet this with the flimsy invention which shifts during the play from an appliance that fits a submarine to one that will be useful in helping to move heavy trunks. It is this invention, so useful in the last act, which is his apology for a pro vita sua. It is his protest against the inferiority which he knows to exist. This mood Mr. Beresford most graphically indicates.

More than once the writer wondered at the first performance if there might not be in the minds of some spectators a special affection for the lovable sinner if he made at least one gesture in the direction of reform. What would have been the result if he had once stiffened his spinal column and said "Quit?" Would there have been a wider sympathy for him? Would there have been a deeper interest in his welfare? We wonder.

Stage drunkards have always been more or less dangerous. It is quite fair to answer that this chap is not a stage drunkard at all. He is the invention of a humorist who never writes a line without impressing the reader that here is really one who loves his fellow man.

It is the striking characteristic of Mr. Marquis that he writes as one who loved the world. He writes as if his inspiration came out of a large heart that embraces all kinds of his fellow men. Without this quality no playwright could have interested his audience for three acts in a drunkard. It is because he is such a lovable human and good-hearted drunkard that the

public showed its love for him. Yet suppose he did reveal just once the disposition to be something else?

Three Character Plays.

The early disappearance of the latest attempt to write a play with but three characters will probably end experiments in this form of dramaturgy for some time to come. But "The Woman Who Laughed" will have its successors, at least its numerous successors, since the form interests playwrights and it undeniably appeals to managers. If success should be gained how great will be the reward? How slight is the outlay for such profits? Edward Locke learned from "The Climax" how much worth while such success is both to manager and dramatist.

Braccio's "Infidels" which has always been the model of this type of such limited dramatic material, made its way over the world. It had been famous for years when Alla Nadimova acted it here as "Countess Coquette." Braccio played with his material most skillfully. He made this little exercise in evasion of all but the most essential characteristics of a drama diverting for its own sake. He compelled a play with only three characters to tell its story in a way that actually absorbed the spectators. Now, was the piece necessarily so brief as some of its successors have been? Yet nobody seems to have objected to the brevity of these later pieces.

At their best they remain no more than a kind of technical tour de force which quite unnecessarily limits the means of the playwright. It is not easy to see why he should confine himself to so few men and women if his tale could be better told by a larger number. As a mere problem in skill it may flatter the dramatist to do it well.

But can he ever be said that he has done it well, if the public is not entertained? He may fill all the requirements of a successful play as he recognizes them, yet if he bores his public there has certainly been no successful event of the experiment. It is like the doctor who has been directly successful although the patient died. Here the doctor benefited. The same may be the fate of the manager. Yet the public is fairly certain to suffer.

But there will be more like the little play that lingered such a brief period at the Longacre Theater. Playwrights cannot resist the temptation. If there had been a little more definiteness of mood "The Woman Who Laughed" might have been just as tiresome, but it would not have been so confusing. At one minute it seemed as if Mr. Locke was profoundly serious. Yet at another he did not hesitate to indulge in the vulgarity of a wheeze about hips and tips.

AT THE SUBURBAN PARKS. Starlight Amusement Park will have its Mardi Gras Carnival one week earlier than the one arranged for Coney Island. The Starlight celebration beginning to-morrow and continuing until the next Sunday.

Luna Park is entering on its last stages of seasonal activity, with the chutes, the crests and other attractions in full swing.

Palladium Park continues to be an agreeable pleasure spot on the New Jersey shore, with its swift steels, its free fireworks display and its inland sea.

Arrangements are being made at Steeplechase for the entertainment of the king and queen during the week of the Mardi Gras. A throne of jewels is being erected over the indoor pool.

Eight Pretty Girls From Some of the Many New Plays and One Mere Man



MISS REMY CARPEN TO APPEAR IN "THE PLOT IN THICKEN'S BOOTH"

MISS MADELINE GREY IN "SUE DEAR" TIMES SQUARE THEATER

Brooklyn Theaters Start the Season

The Majestic Theater's season will begin to-morrow with a special Labor Day matinee, when A. H. Woods will present the melodramatic comedy "Lawful Larceny." Lowell Sherman will be seen in his original role, and in his support will be Miss Edna Goodrich, Miss Belle Bennett and others.

Louis F. Werba, manager and lessee, announces that the Montauk Theater will reopen Monday, September 11, with "Six Cylinder Love." A large number of the present year's hits will be seen in the near future and the policy of giving high class attractions at popular prices will be continued.

"Up the Ladder," a comedy by Owen Davis, which William A. Brady presented at the Playhouse last season, will come to Teller's Shubert Theater with a matinee to-morrow. Miss Doris Kenyon remains in the leading role.

The Labor Day week program at the New Brighton will be headed by Miss Kitty Flynn in her "League of Song Steps," with Sister Rose and Brother Ted. Others will be Jimmy Lucas, Jama Doyle and Miss Evelyn Cavanaugh, Davis and Darnell and Dotson.

Lionel Atwill will be the headliner at the Orpheum. Others will be Miss Patricia, "The Words and Music Makers," Crawford and Broderick and Bronson and Edwards.

NEW BURLESQUES COMING.

A new burlesque in two acts and seven scenes called "Keep Smiling" will be given at the Columbia Theater this week. Its producer, James E. Cooper, is a pioneer in the field of advanced burlesque. The company is headed by Bert Laur, eccentric comedian, who is assisted by Barry Melton, Lillian Rookley, Babe La Fay and Emily Dyer.

The regular season at the Olympic will open on Labor Day with a matinee. The attraction for the week will be "Smiles and Kisses," a burlesque in two acts and seven scenes. The cast includes Fred Binder, Jack Armesby and Marion Morris.

TO FOLLOW "THE BAT."

With the closing of "The Bat," after a run of two years and ten days, the Morosco Theater will remain dark for one week to permit necessary repairs.

It reopens September 12, when Wagners and Kemper present Avery Hopwood's new comedy, "Why Men Leave Home."

Calendar of First Performances

MONDAY.

GEORGE M. COHAN THEATER—"The Endless Chain," a play by James Forbes, with Miss Margaret Lawrence, will be A. L. Er-langer's initial presentation of the season. The three acts are laid in a fashionable New York hotel. Others in the company are Miss Olive May, Miss Martha Mayo, Kenneth MacKenna and Kenneth Hunter.

KIAW THEATER—"Topsy Turvy," a comedy of Scottish characters by Macdonald Watson, will be Marc Kiaw's first production of the season. The author is also the principal comedian, and he is supported by the original cast from London, including Miss Nell Barker, Miss Stella Campbell, Frances Ross Campbell and Walter Roy.

CASINO THEATER—"Sally, Irene and Mary" will be presented by the Shuberts, with a cast headed by Eddie Dowling, who wrote the book with Cyrus Wood. The music is by J. Fred Coots, with lyrics by Raymond Klages. Misses Jean Brown, Kitty Flynn and Edna Morn play the titular roles.

TUESDAY.

BOOTH THEATER—Brook Pemberton will present "The Plot Thickens," a comedy from the Italian of Luigi Bazzini and Arnaldo Fracastoro, adapted by Thomas Beer. The leading roles will be played by Edwin Neander, Miss Remy Carpen and Dallas Welford.

WEDNESDAY.

BROADHURST THEATER—"Wild Oats Lane," the first play by George Broadhurst in several years, will be presented by the author, manager. It is based on Gerald Beaumont's story, "The Gambling Chaplain." Maclyn Arbuckle is featured, and other players are Miss Marion Cookley, Richard Barboe and Douglas Wood.

he is active all the time. Mr. White's adventures in racing are generally said to have been less, considerably less, fortunate.

More or Less Vague.

It is probable that Mrs. Fiske, when she returns to the stage this autumn, will be seen in an adaptation of a novel made by Harrison Grey Fiske. She is now in the Adirondacks.

W. Somerset Maugham's latest play, "Garden of Stone," which A. H. Woods recently produced in Atlantic City, deals with the question of the Eurasian, which interests all visitors to the Orient, who afterward write about it. An Eurasian girl, which is one with a native mother and English or American father, also plays an important part in "Kimonos."

"Miss Thompson," by Maugham, which was first published in the *Star* and later reprinted in book form as "Rain," will be made into a play.

A Star at Will.

"If I'm not a star," said the young actress to her comrades at lunch, "I'm as good as one. J. Woods Hopkins told me he'd make a star of me any day I brought him the play that he thought was worth producing."

The artistic pride of the young lady was much swollen by the honor. But it happened that every one of the four young actresses at the table had received the same kind of an offer. They were all stars only temporarily in eclipse because there was no play for them.

"It would have to be a pretty desperate case," a manager said to the reporter for THE NEW YORK HERALD, "who could not get a manager to make her the star of any play in which he had great confidence. Of course, if she had a glass eye or a wooden leg, he might hesitate. Other things being equal, however, the value of a good play is so much in the opinion of any manager that he would never hesitate to accept it even with such a string to it as the necessity of putting a comparatively unknown actress into an important role. He knows that the right kind of a play cannot be killed even by such treatment."

"So, assuming as it may seem, that girl was telling the truth when she said her manager was willing to make her a star if she only brought him the right sort of a play."

"It is just this chance which makes it so wise for the young playwright to try to fit some actor when he sets to work. The easiest way in the world to get a play by an unknown before the public is to write a piece that appeals to the vanity of some star, or some actor, who is approaching the importance of that position. It is just in that way that most young dramatists got their first hearing."

They Acted Together.

It is a singular circumstance that Edwitt Clark and Genevieve Ward should have died within such a short time of one another. When Miss Ward won the litigation over "Forget Me Not" and compelled Lester Ward to discontinue the performance of the play with his company headed by Rosa Coghlan, she came here to act *Stephanie* at Booth's and the Union Square theater. Mr. Clark came along as her manager and to act *Rip Horne* Welby in the same performances which established her popularity in this country. Both were Americans who passed more of their professional lives abroad.

Living Year Role.

If Walter James does not entertain an especially sunny view of life just at present it may be what the sociologists call "occupational" influence. Mr. James acts the dumb servant who has lost his speech along with his tongue in "The Monster" at the Thirtieth Street Theater at night and by way of spending his days in a more cheerful way acts the stranger in the film version of Eugene Bue's "The Mysteries of Paris," which is seen to be released. Yet life was not over this.

The actor, film and stage, did not

always devote his days and nights to professional melancholy. Indeed he began life as a merry mountain lad, specifically in the mountains of Virginia and Tennessee. He was a farmer, picked cotton and stripped tobacco and even split rails. It is said, moreover, by his intimate friends that he not only knows how to distill the corn kind, but steadfastly maintains that good white mule beats any other. Taste in such matters is however personal.

Working in one way and another for an education, Mr. James decided that the education of the mountain school was not enough for his purposes. So he finally saved enough to go to Georgetown University. He was only taking a business course, but he was academic enough for football purposes. He is six feet three and weighs now more than the 180 which was his griddiron weight. He entered the drama through the moving pictures, but the business end of the profession, as he was manager of a moving picture theatre. A. H. Woods engaged him first for the stage and he is now established on a busy if more or less gloomy career.

Nitched to a Star.

It was several years ago that a well known English actor came to this country. He was highly popular abroad and nobody doubted that he would be equally liked here. His wife acted, in the orthodox British manner, the leading roles with her husband. She was quaintly and most dishearteningly homesick. The hippopotamus that the lady found so plain was like the first on the handkerchief box in comparison with her. She was a museum piece, indeed, in unrelieved ugliness. Yet in one of her husband's plays she had to look into a brook like Marjorie and modestly murmur how beautiful she was.

That was more than the American managers could stand. The public had drawn out before they did. The actor was almost a highly praised. But his wife was too much for an American audience. The managers suggested with all possible delicacy that the American tour could not be continued unless there were another leading lady. How ever popular she might be in London and Stoke Poges it did not seem probable that she would ever enjoy the same following here.

Of course the actor flared up and then and there packed his boxes and hiked it overseas. He spoke there with the greatest eloquence of the insult which he had received from those American barbarians who had dared suggest that another leading actress might be a greater favorite in this country. The actor never returned. Both he and his wife are still popular in England.

Now there seems likely to be a repetition of this incident. A tragedian who like all actors who play Shakespeare needs the aid and comfort of a financial supporter in the background, is said to be contemplating a year of retirement to Hollywood to exhibit his talents before a camera. He had planned to give all the important roles this year to his wife. She was to gratify an ambition to act all the *Beowulf* of Shakespeare which she could not under any possible circumstances ever have done but for the fact that she was the wife of the star. He was willing to lend his prestige to the end that she secured the importance she desired.

But the momentary success, well, he was not so willing. He didn't see any reason why the man should pay, pay, pay, so he withdrew. They are said to be having a heavy heart. So it may be that the tragedian will resume his tour; yet it is by no means certain.

John Cort's New Theater.

John Cort has so altered the theater hitherto known as the Sixty-third Street that it will scarcely be recognized by the public which goes to welcome Miss Josephine Victor there on September 27 in B. Eden Payne's play "Dolly Jordan." There will not only be a new stage with a depth of twenty-eight feet and a height of more than double that dimension, but there will also be a series of new dressing rooms.

The color schemes will be of ivory and gold because that combination has brought Mr. Cort much luck at the Cort Theater. Of course, out of compliment to "Shuffle Along," which put the new theater on the New York map, Mr. Cort decided on ivory and gold. Silk lined panels will cover the side walls, while there will also be an entirely new facade.

Mr. Cort has named the new theater in honor of Augustin Daly, which is a graceful compliment to one of the most famous of New York's managers and to the past generation of theatergoers as well. It may be for that reason that the new play by Mr. Payne is to be a costume drama—the first of the present season.

"MANHATTAN" IN NEW HOME.

The season of the Nora Bayes Theater begins with a Labor Day matinee, when John Cromwell, Inc. presents "East Side, West Side." This play, formerly known as "Manhattan," will be transferred on that day from the Playhouse to the Nora Bayes. The cast will remain practically the same.



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